

AGENDA ITEM VI B

PROGRESS REPORT ON CONDITIONALLY APPROVED PROGRAM

NICHOLLS STATE UNIVERSITY

B.S. IN MANUFACTURING ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At its meeting of March 23, 2000, the Board of Regents took the following action:

Conditional approval is granted for the proposed B.S. program in Manufacturing Technology (CIP Code 15.0603) at Nicholls State University. Beginning June 1, 2000, and on the date every year thereafter until accreditation of the program has been granted by the Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology, the University shall submit to the Commissioner of Higher Education a report updating efforts to address weaknesses and problematic areas identified by external consultants and the staff.

The Board received annual progress reports from Nicholls as required above¹ and directed the University to continue such reports until program accreditation had been achieved. Before considering the 2004 progress report, the staff believes it to be important to recall the following excerpt from the 2003 staff summary:

The program continues to grow in both enrollment and numbers of graduates. The University has been successful in attracting external funds to augment equipment. Industrial partnerships have been initiated and have proven to be helpful both in terms of monetary support and supplementary personnel.

Accreditation plans have been delayed until 2005. Faculty resources are not yet sufficient to meet ABET requirements. Campus leadership changes have also adversely affected the original timeline for program accreditation application. These barriers should be resolved soon and the University plans to submit a self-study in Spring 2005, with a subsequent on-site accreditation visit by Fall 2005. The staff notes that, given the date of original program approval, the University has until Fall 2006 to achieve appropriate accreditation for this program.

Summarized below are the results from the fourth progress report.

¹ June 28, 2001; August 22, 2002; and August 28, 2003.

STAFF ANALYSIS

1. Student Numbers

Enrollment has grown from 21 students in Fall 2003 to around 35-40 in Fall 2004. Further recruitment efforts during this period were hampered by a downturn in related area industries. Six students graduated in Spring 2004.

2. Faculty

The program currently engages the services of 1.5 FTE faculty. One full-time faculty member is contemplating retirement in May 2005. This would demolish the program's faculty, particularly in light of a program accreditation requirement that at least 3.0 FTE faculty are necessary. Nicholls notes that efforts toward faculty expansion and development have been somewhat stymied during recent changes in University leadership; these changes have been resolved.

3. Equipment

Need for new and better equipment continues to be acute. A partial LEQSF Enhancement Grant (\$37,000) was received in Spring 2004 to purchase laboratory equipment. A new SME grant application will be submitted in December 2004. This application will also include an outreach component to high schools designed to enhance future student interest.

4. Industrial Partnerships

While the current business climate for employment of program graduates is not good, industry continues to state strong support for the program.

5. Accreditation

While most requirements for TAC/ABET accreditation are in place, faculty numbers are inadequate. It is hoped that new administration will see the need for additional faculty resources soon.

STAFF SUMMARY

The status of this program is not good. TAC/ABET accreditation of this program is mandated by Regents policy and must be achieved by Fall 2006. Currently, the program does not meet basic faculty requirements for accreditation. As TAC/ABET requires a minimum of 3.0 FTE faculty; Nicholls has only 1.5 FTE faculty with a likely loss of 1.0 FTE due to retirement in the near future. The program therefore faces a personnel crisis. Nicholls must move swiftly to correct this situation if there is to be any possibility of attaining TAC/ABET accreditation by the Regents deadline.

Student numbers are marginal. An undergraduate program in its fourth year of operation should have significantly more than 35-40 majors. Using a commonly accepted formula, approximately 10-15% of enrollees should graduate per year. At current enrollment levels, this program would only produce 4-6 graduates per year – well below the Regents minimum of 8 per year. To correct this situation, the University may have to consider recruiting outside its traditional service area. As this is the only such program in Louisiana, prospects for significant student interest elsewhere in the state should be good.

Dr. Carroll Falcon, University Provost, has recently spoken with staff to express his concerns about the program's future. He fully realizes that best efforts will be required to address significant weaknesses.

Another progress report must be required. It is critical that the 2005 progress report include clear and compelling evidence that the University has implemented successful corrective strategies.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The staff recommends that the Academic and Student Affairs Committee receive the AY 2003-2004 Progress Report from Nicholls State University Relative to Implementation of the B.S. Program in Manufacturing Engineering Technology. In its next progress report, to be due August 1, 2005, the University shall provide evidence of significant progress toward addressing all staff concerns identified above.